

Kitchener-Waterloo

Avoid Waterloo anti-lockdown rally this weekend, officials urge, as Maxime Bernier expected to attend

'All of us want to get back to normal, but these types of protests do the opposite,' local MP says

[Kate Bueckert](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 04, 2021 10:50 AM ET | Last Updated: June 4, 2021



A woman holds up a sign during an anti-lockdown rally in uptown Waterloo in southern Ontario on May 9. Another rally planned for this weekend is being promoted by People's Party of Canada Leader Maxime Bernier, who is critical of lockdown restrictions and is expected to attend. (Hala Ghonaim/CBC)



Officials in Waterloo region are doing everything they can to hold people who plan and attend anti-lockdown rallies to account, regional Chair Karen Redman says.

Anti-lockdown rallies have been held over several weeks in the southern Ontario region. They start in uptown Waterloo and often, participants walk to Kitchener as a group afterwards.

The demonstration planned for this weekend is expected to include People's Party of Canada Leader Maxime Bernier.

"From the very beginning, the path that we took during the pandemic, the goal of enforcement was compliance with the provincial legislation," Redman said Friday in an interview on CBC K-W's *The Morning Edition* with host Craig Norris. "That continues to be the focus."

"There is enforcement being done, but there's a balance between allowing people their democratic rights and enforcing public health guidelines," Redman said.

She said she believes police and municipal enforcement officers are handling the rallies the best way possible. She noted there are families with children present.

"You don't want to go into a mob of people and start arresting people."

While she hasn't been in meetings about specific measures being considered, Redman said it's her understanding police and city officials have discussed options like putting up barriers similar to what was used on Ezra Avenue in March to stop an unsanctioned street party on St. Patrick's Day.

She said they continue to discuss strategies for situations that could turn volatile.

Bernier calls lockdowns 'unconstitutional'

Bernier, who has attended other rallies across the county and has been critical of lockdown restrictions, says he is coming to Waterloo because he was invited.

He calls the measures "draconian" and said in an interview "it's unconstitutional, unfair and unjust."

Ontario has been among the strictest provinces in using lockdown measures while working to get COVID-19 cases under control. It's expected to start its [reopening plan ahead of the June 14 target](#).

Bernier has said while the lockdowns are put in place by each province, "the federal government has a role to play" and that's why he's speaking out.

"When our regulations and legislation don't respect our Constitution, you need to fight that. And that's what we are doing when we are doing these freedom rallies."

He said if he receives a ticket for attending the rally, he'll fight it the same way he plans to fight other similar tickets.

Police, bylaw will monitor event

The Waterloo Regional Police Service said it will be "treating this as we have treated similar past events."

"Members of our [COVID-19 Integrated Response Team] team will be in attendance to monitor the event and to gather any evidence that will assist in laying charges at a later date," police spokesperson Cherri Greeno said in an email.



A gathering in Waterloo Town Square for the May 9 anti-lockdown rally. (Hala Ghonaim/CBC)

"We want to encourage people to abide by provincial rules and public health guidelines as we continue through this pandemic."

Waterloo's municipal enforcement services also issued a statement to CBC K-W.

"First, we urge people not to attend. We have a consistent approach with these demonstrations; our focus is on maintaining officer and participant safety," the statement said. "We will be in attendance and will monitor/investigate and follow up with charges as required."

- [**Officers treat all protests, demonstrations equally, says Waterloo regional police chief**](#)
- [**Here's why Waterloo regional police can't just bust up anti-lockdown rallies**](#)

Weekly enforcement updates provided by Redman from previous COVID-19 briefings show police and bylaw have handed out 51 tickets for demonstrations:

- Two were for a May 8 demonstration in Waterloo.
- Two were for a May 8 anti-racism demonstration in Baden.
- 39 were issued for a May 9 demonstration in Waterloo Town Square.
- Two were given between May 6 to May 12 for a gathering in Kitchener's Victoria Park.
- Six were for a May 16 demonstration in Kitchener's Victoria Park.

Stephen Warner, a spokesperson for Solicitor General Sylvia Jones, said public health measures are in place to keep people safe.

When asked if the province might step in if the anti-lockdown rallies get too large, he said, "governments and politicians do not direct the police regarding their operations. However, local policies would be in place for police services to request assistance from other services as necessary."





Waterloo municipal enforcement services officers observe an anti-lockdown rally in May in uptown Waterloo. (Hala Ghonaim/CBC)

'Out-of-town speakers and organizers'

Waterloo MP Bardish Chagger said the region is "not out of the woods" with the COVID-19 virus.

"I know that all of us want to get back to normal, but these types of protests do the opposite, by spreading the virus and prolonging lockdowns," the Liberal MP said in an emailed statement.

"Now, more than ever, our individual actions matter and we must all adhere to local public health guidelines."

Waterloo Mayor Dave Jaworsky also asked people not to attend the rally.

"Our local hospital workers have worked tirelessly to combat the pandemic and save lives. We owe them a debt of gratitude," he said.

"Following the rules helps nurses, doctors and all front line workers save lives and eventually get much needed rest. I stand in support of our local workers, as we condemn these shameful and untimely efforts of, what seems to be, out-of-town speakers and organizers."

Redman credited people in the community for helping lower case rates in the region and said people who disagree with measures should still stay home on Sunday to keep other people safe.

- [**Race underway to get 2nd vaccine shots done before new variant takes over**](#)

"I would say stay home. These variants of concern are hugely concerning," Redman said. "Nobody wants to see a summer where we can't gather with friends and family and it is a possibility."

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